

# *Purpose of the Plan*

## Introduction to the Curlew Grassland Plan

The Curlew National Grassland (hereafter generally referred to as the “Grassland”) is a portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Administrative Unit. Specifically administered as a part of the Westside Ranger District, the Grassland is situated in southeast Idaho, north of the Utah-Idaho State line. It encompasses approximately 47,600 acres of federal land intermixed with private land. It is located approximately 17 air miles west of Malad, Idaho. The Forest Headquarters Office is located at 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 83401. (See Vicinity Map on inside front cover page.)

### Why are we developing a Grassland Plan?

The Former Chief of the Forest Service, Mike Dombeck, in a letter to Regional Foresters dated April 22, 1998, recognized the value of national grasslands and the controversy over resource issues and decisions associated with them. In order to address the unique nature of grasslands and to focus attention during the planning process, the Chief directed that a separate plan for grasslands be developed as part of the planning process.

The Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland Land Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) was signed on September 27, 1985. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that Forest Plans be updated or revised on a 10-15 year cycle or as monitoring identifies a need for change. Because the Caribou LRMP did not have a separate Plan for the Curlew Grassland, the Forest Plan is being amended. 16 USC 1604(a) and 1604(f).

### What is the Legal Framework of the Grassland Plan?

An approved land and resource management plan (Plan) is the product of a comprehensive notice and comment process established by Congress in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). The approval of a Plan establishes direction so that all future decisions in the planning area will include an "interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic and other sciences." 16 USC 1604.

People, their needs and values, have keenly influenced natural resource conservation. In 1881 the first federal legislation addressing forest resource protection and management was enacted when Congress funded the Division of Forestry. During America's expansion in the mid and late 1800's, people became concerned about land abuses on the western frontier. As a result, Congress enacted the Organic Act of 1891. This Act

established forest reserves from existing public domain lands for the purpose of improving and protecting the “forests within the reservation, or for the purpose of securing favorable water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of the citizens of the United States.”

Around the turn of last century, the west was settled largely as a result of the Homestead Act. Many acres in the arid high desert were deep plowed and farmed. In the 1920's and 1930's, a severe drought caused many farmers to go broke. These lands were very disturbed and soil erosion rates were high. In 1933, Congress passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act to provide funds for the purchase of privately-owned submarginal lands throughout the nation. Before this legislation ended, Congress had acquired over 10 million acres, much of which had been severely eroded. On July 22, 1937, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act to, among other things, “develop a program of land conservation and land utilization in order thereby to correct maladjustments in land use and thus assist in controlling soil erosion, reforestation, preserving natural resources, protecting fish and wildlife,” etc. A short time later, the lands acquired under Bankhead-Jones were transferred to the Soil Conservation Service who enacted programs to reduce erosion. Some years later, the Title III lands were renamed National Grasslands and management of them was transferred to the National Forest System. With this transfer, the lands acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Act became subject to the laws and regulations governing National Forests.

Management goals for the National Forests were articulated in the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSYA) of 1960, and they remain the foundation for federally managed forests and grasslands. The MUSYA directs national forest and grassland management for the combination of uses that “will best meet the needs of the American people.” Resource management is to be coordinated for “multiple uses” – considering the values of the various resources, but not necessarily maximizing dollar returns, nor requiring that areas be managed for all or even most uses. The Act also calls for “sustained yield” – a high level of resource outputs in perpetuity without impairing the productivity of the land.

The Grassland Plan implements the National Forest Management Act and the other laws by establishing direction so that all future decisions in the planning area will include an “interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic and other sciences” [16 USC 1604(b), (f), (g) and (i)]. It also provides direction to assure coordination of multiple-uses (outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, fish, minerals, and wilderness) and the sustained-yield of products and services [16 USC 1604(e)].

### **What Does the Grassland Plan Do?**

The primary purpose of land and resource planning on the Curlew National Grassland is to sustain our watersheds and rangelands, providing for the multiple use of these lands. The Grassland Plan sets a clear course of action for 10 to 15 years. The Plan answers the questions: “What are conditions and outcomes that we should seek on the Curlew to

provide for ecological sustainability and contribute to economic and social sustainability? How will accomplishment be measured? What kinds of actions do we need to take to achieve the conditions and outcomes? And, what will it cost?" This amendment builds upon the existing Caribou Land and Resource Management Plan, updating the current guidance to better reflect changing public values and current science and using this information to develop a separate management plan for the Curlew National Grassland.

The guiding framework for the forest plan comes from public issues of national, regional or local interest regarding the management of the Curlew National Grassland. The identification, analysis and resolution of these issues is a desired outcome of the planning process. Building on the foundation of sustainable ecological systems, forest planning provides for sustainable development that contributes to our economic and cultural systems and to our communities. Plan approval does not authorize, fund, or carry out any projects, unless specifically stated in the Record of Decision.

In the past, Forest or Grassland planning often focused on the short-term issues of land allocation and timber harvest levels. While these are still important issues, we believe that, consistent with the emphasis on ecological and social sustainability, the Plan emphasizes the development of desired long-term landscape conditions and outcomes that will provide this sustainability. Using information on current conditions, from bioregional assessments and elsewhere, our Grassland Plan builds a pathway from the current state to the desired future state and includes an estimate of actions and budgets that will be needed.

The Plan does this by establishing four categories of specific decisions under NFMA:

- Contains a set of goals and objectives that lead to ecological sustainability, contributes to economic and social sustainability, and provides for multiple uses. (36 CFR 219.11(b))
- Establishes grassland-wide requirements (standards and guidelines) that apply to future management activities. (36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27)
- Establishes management direction through the use of prescription area designation. Prescriptions and management direction are the framework under which future site-specific decisions are made. (36 CFR 219.11(c))
- Establishes monitoring and evaluation requirements. (36 CFR 219.11(d))

The Grassland Plan focuses small landscape planning on the mix of activities and projects needed to meet goals and implement the Plan. Projects and activities are proposed, analyzed and carried out within the framework of the Plan. The consistency requirement of NFMA directs the Forest Service to evaluate proposed activities against the desired future conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines of the Plan. The Plan allows or prohibits some uses and establishes standards and guidelines that regulate future resource use but it does not allocate uses on a site-specific level. All projects remain subject to site-specific and continuing compliance with Federal environmental

laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act.

Through monitoring and evaluation, new activities can be added to the Plan if they are consistent with the general strategic intent of the Plan. This adaptive management is critical to keeping Plans up-to-date and focused on achieving the desired future conditions we have committed to work towards.

### **Plant and Animal Diversity and Population Viability**

The National Forest Management Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to implement regulations "specifying guidelines for land management plans developed to achieve the goals of the Program which ... (B) provide for a diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple use objectives ...." [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(B)]. The diversity provision is one of ten subsections of direction from Congress regarding the implementation of planning regulations for Forest (Grassland) Plans to provide for multiple use and sustained yield. In accord with NFMA, the Secretary implemented regulations that address the diversity provision at 36 CFR 219.3, 219.19, 219.26, 219.27(a)(5), 219.27(a)(6) and 219.27(g).

The NFMA diversity provision and the fish and wildlife resource regulation establish a goal to provide habitat for the continued persistence of plant and animal species in the planning area. The goal is met by following the provisions of 36 CFR 219.19(a)(1) through (a)(7). The bottom line is that the Forest Service may not adopt a plan that it knows or believes would, through possible future Forest Service actions, extirpate a species. Viability assessments of all species are not required. Compliance with 36 CFR 219.19 is not subject to precise numerical interpretation and cannot be set at a single threshold.

The fish and wildlife resource regulation does not require species-specific assessments to support a finding that a proposal is consistent with its terms. Rather the decision-maker may place reasonable reliance upon assessments of (1) species with habitat needs that are essentially the same; (2) a group of species generally thought to perform the same or similar ecosystem functions; and/or (3) the continued integrity and function of ecosystem(s) in which a species is found. Flexibility in selecting methodology is especially appropriate for species assessments, given the expertise and knowledge of local forest officials concerning the lands they manage, the variety of complex issues involved, and the often-limited resources available.

### **Federal Tribal Trust Responsibilities**

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has ancestral Treaty Rights on all public domain lands reserved for National Forest purposes that are presently administered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The relationship of the United States government with American Indian tribes is based on legal agreements between sovereign nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting and fishing rights to tribal members on "all

unoccupied lands of the United States.” These rights are still in effect, and management actions in this plan recognize valid rights. Consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council is required on land management activities and allocations that could affect these rights. Forest Supervisor Reese has consulted with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council regarding this amendment and Grassland Plan (FEIS, Chapter 6).

### **Adaptive Management**

An adaptive management strategy offers an avenue to describe and evaluate the consequences of changing information. This Grassland Plan uses adaptive management to insure that the management of this ecosystem responds to changing conditions and new information. As explained in the Final EIS and elsewhere in this Plan, the Curlew National Grassland is unique in many ways. The highly altered landscape affords many challenges since principles of management for native ecosystems do not apply universally here. During development of this plan, many questions have arisen regarding the proper way to manage the Grassland to achieve the Desired Future Conditions. Although the analysis reflects the best information available for Grassland management, some of the basic tenets have not been validated on the Grassland itself. For this reason, managers must be able to respond quickly to new information and practices obtained from site-specific monitoring. Adaptive management allows managers to respond to changing conditions without having to amend the Grassland Plan as often as with conventional NEPA decisions.

### **What Management Direction has been Considered?**

#### **DRAFT 1995 RESOURCES PLANNING ACT (RPA) PROGRAM**

To ensure the Caribou National Forest's local program management was in alignment with local, regional and national trends, supplies, and demands from America's National Forests and Grasslands, a review was conducted of the Forest Service's Draft 1995 Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program.

Direction for the Grassland is consistent with RPA.

#### **LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENTS**

The Inland Native Fish Strategy established new interim riparian goals, riparian management objectives, and standards and guidelines for all new and proposed, and some ongoing, projects and activities. The goal of the strategy is to maintain or restore water quality, stream channel integrity, water tables, and riparian vegetation diversity and productivity to support healthy, functioning riparian and aquatic ecosystems within the Columbia River Basin. This new direction replaced direction in the Forest Plan, except where the Forest Plan provided more protection for fish habitat.

This strategy is termed "interim" because it was designed to be replaced by direction from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) and Environmental Impact Statement. Although only a very small portion of the Grassland is in the Columbia River Basin, the science assessment was used for the Curlew Plan and analysis. This was a coordinated approach and management strategy for the restoration and maintenance of long-term ecosystem health and integrity while supporting the

economic and/or social needs of people, cultures, and communities, and providing sustainable and predictable levels of goods and services.

#### ROADS MANAGEMENT RULE

In November of 2000, the Forest Service published its Roads Policy Rule to govern the transportation system on National Forest System lands. In compliance with this Rule, the Interdisciplinary Team conducted a roads analysis for the Curlew National Grassland in the Fall of 2001. This roads analysis follows the process found in, Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions about Managing the National Forest Transportation System.

The objective of the roads analysis is to provide line officers with information about the transportation system within the Curlew National Grassland to help them develop road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are affordable and efficiently managed, have minimal negative ecological effects on the land, and are in balance with available funding for needed management actions. This analysis identifies the problems, risks and opportunities regarding roads in the Curlew National Grassland area. The information generated from the analysis help define the purpose and need of projects that may be proposed at the site-specific level.

Road Management Objectives (RMOs) establish the intended purpose of an individual road based on management area direction and access management objectives. Road management objectives contain design criteria, operation criteria, and maintenance criteria (FSH 7709.55, Section 33). Road Management Objectives for classified roads in the Curlew National Grassland are located on file at the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

#### WESTERN REGIONAL CORRIDOR STUDY

Current direction meets management needs for lands now, and into the foreseeable future. Based on direction found in the Regional Deskguide (1993); a review of **1992 Western Regional Corridor Study**, prepared by the Western Utility Group; and direction found in the 1985 Forest Plan for utility corridors have been reviewed. Utility corridors on the Grassland have been identified and management prescriptions applied. The Forest does not anticipate requests for any additional small hydropower projects in the foreseeable future that could affect water flows on the Grassland. Direction in the 1985 Forest Plan is adequate to meet current needs and is incorporated into this Plan.

## How is this Grassland Plan Structured?

- Chapter 1 is an overview of the purpose of the Grassland Plan.
- Chapter 2 is a summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) and major issues driving the planning process. This provides a basis for understanding where the direction in the Plan originated. It shows the baseline information and public sentiment that drove the Desired Future Conditions (DFCs) and goals.
- Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the Grassland-wide Management Direction. Organized by resource area, this chapter contains specific DFCs, goal, objectives, standards and guidelines. This management direction applies across the Curlew National Grassland unless superseded by the direction in Chapter 4.
- Chapter 4 describes the management prescriptions that will be applied on the ground to achieve the Curlew DFCs. These prescription areas have direction specifically designed to meet the goals and objectives of that prescription. Thus, the Grassland has a double-tiered approach to management; there is direction applicable to all areas of the Curlew (Chapter 3) and direction to meet specific DFCs for a particular geographic area, subwatershed, timber stand, etc (Chapter 4).
- Chapter 5 describes the plan for implementing the Grassland Plan. It contains a synopsis of the objectives we will be working to meet over the next decade. Part 2 of Chapter 5 contains the Monitoring and Evaluation section. This describes the monitoring we will do to validate the Plan assumptions; answer some of the questions that have arisen during the analysis; determine the effectiveness of standards and guidelines in meeting our desired future conditions; and measure the rate of implementation of those standards and guidelines.
- The Grassland Plan also includes a Glossary and an Index.
- Appendix A is a listing of the laws and regulations governing management of the National Forest and Grasslands. Appendix B is a list of animal species found on the Curlew and Appendix C is a list of potential revegetation plants.